

The Wild Lands of the Southwest

By TONY KELSO

Southwestern Duxbury is stunning in its rural beauty, long in its history, yet often overlooked for its deep connection to Duxbury's past. Thanks to the partnership of the O'Neil family, Wildlands Trust and, hopefully, the Town of Duxbury, the first two elements will continue far into the future and more people will come to appreciate the history and beauty of this section of Duxbury.

Today, the area is roughly bordered by Kingston and Pembroke, Route 53/Kingstown Way and Summer St., South, Winter, Pine and Birch streets.

The land is relatively flat, with bands of woods and open fields dotting the area, looking the way Duxbury did 100 years ago. In addition to farming, which has always supported the families in this area, lumbering, iron smithing, cranberry growing and fish hatching were ways these families used their land and the natural resources of this part of Duxbury. The woodlots in particular were in scattered locations and families each had several that supported their own needs and were the first source of timber for the shipyards along Duxbury Bay.

Hall's, Pine and Bassett brooks are the principal waterways of the area, with each being dammed in order to create ponds and reservoirs for certain industries. Hall's Brook not only waters the O'Neil cows, but also the Clearwater Drive neighborhood and eventually the cranberry bogs and a pond on Winter and Pine streets. Pine Brook was dammed for a sawmill that has been rebuilt several times, which most recently was run by Carl O'Neil's grandfather and great grandfather, Horatio Chandler. The dam creates Lower Chandler Pond, named for Horatio. By the 1950s, the pond helped shape the Lakeshore Drive neighborhood. Bassett Brook was dammed to create a series of reservoirs for the Brookdale Trout Company and their trout hatchery, which has lent its name to the Trout Farm neighborhood.

We first have to imagine the area without Route 53/Kingstown Way, which bisected the old farms in that area in the 1920s. It became known as State Road Route 3, the way to Cape Cod, until the early 1960s when the new highway took that number.

Autumn Avenue is also relatively new, having been put through the middle of the area around 1900, although older cart paths dotted the farms and led down from Summer Street near the Tarkiln schoolhouses.

Summer Street is probably the oldest street, being part of the original Bay Path that connected the settlements of Plymouth and Boston. South Street came in 1709, in order to bring the traffic headed north and south over drier ground and around the Dead Swamp that lay between Tarkiln and Tinkertown.

Winter Street is also ancient; it was long known as the Halifax road, as it led into Pembroke and then to the town of Halifax. Birch Street was built by 1833 and leads to the Pembroke Ponds and Silver Lake. Pine Street is interesting in that only the middle part of its length is in Duxbury, it begins in Kingston and ends in Pembroke. It was likely built to connect directly an old forge in Kingston and the sawmill on Pine Brook in Pembroke. Old Forge Road is a little used woods road that skirts the Autumn Avenue piece of the O'Neil farm and leads down from the Summer Street houses to the forge in Kingston.

The area has always had strong connections with the towns of Kingston and Pembroke. Families married over the town lines so much that in order to untangle the history of the area you have to look to both towns to find Duxbury families. They began moving out to this area in the early 1700s, as this area was the commons land of the town. The commons were divided around 1712, when Pembroke was split from Duxbury as a separate town. Families like the Chandlers, Sampsons, Brewsters, Philips and Delanos began to set up farms in this remote area, especially in the meadows that bordered the brooks where beavers helped clear the land by gnawing trees down for their dams. These farms stayed as farms in these same families for generations, as evidenced by the O'Neil farm. It was only after 1950, that change began to come, with new neighborhoods being built in woodlots and edge areas of the old farms.

Southwestern Duxbury may not have the physically dramatic landscape of the Southwestern United States, but its landscape is dramatic in how it still reflects and supports the farms and woodlots that shaped our history, and were the lifeblood of many a Duxbury family.

